



PREPARED FOR THE URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

**Project Address:** 1128 and 1138 E Washington Avenue  
**Application Type:** New Development in Urban Design Commission (UDD) No. 8  
Final Approval is Requested  
**Legistar File ID #** [67172](#)  
**Prepared By:** Kevin Firchow, AICP, Principal Planner

## Background Information

**Applicant | Contact:** Melissa Huggins, Urban Assets Consulting | Bridget Fraser, Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) | Tim Crum, Strang, Inc.

**Project Description:** The applicant is seeking final approval for a new 40,000 square foot rehearsal facility for the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) to include two rehearsal spaces, a percussion room, rehearsal studios, a music library, instrument repair shop, administrative offices, and community gathering space. The development site includes two lots that are separated by an existing rental car facility property that is not part of this application. The new building is proposed on the existing “Avenue Bar” site at 1128 E Washington Avenue, while parking is proposed to remain at the smaller 1138 E Washington Avenue site. No design modifications are currently proposed for the existing parking lot to serve this applicant.

### Project Schedule:

- The UDC received an informational presentation on September 22, 2021.
- The UDC granted initial approval on December 15, 2021.
- The Plan Commission approved the related demolition request on January 10, 2022.

**Approval Standards:** The UDC is an **approving body** on the development request. The development site is within Urban Design District 8 (UDD 8) Block 5b, which requires that the Urban Design Commission review the proposed project using the design requirements and guidelines of Section 33.24(15).

In applying the standards, the code states that the Urban Design Commission shall apply the [UDD 8](#) district requirements and guidelines as may be appropriate in order to implement the Core Development Principles of the [East Washington Avenue Capitol Gateway Corridor Plan](#). In order to approve, ordinance requires that the development is found to meet the requirements and conform as much as possible to the guidelines.

## Summary of Design Considerations and Recommendations

Planning Division staff recommends that the UDC provide findings and base their decision on the aforementioned standards and guidelines for UDD 8.

### Summary of Design Considerations

As part of their initial approval, the Urban Design Commission made the following findings and conditions:

- The Commission finds that the 17-foot setback and the proposed height of this development conforms to the spirit and intent of Urban Design District (UDD) No. 8.
- Revisit the material selections and how they are applied before returning for final approval.

With those findings and the granting of initial approval, staff advise that the UDC's final review comments focus on the specified details. Additionally, the landscape plan has been revised and as such, UDC may provide comment on that aspect.

The Planning Division notes the following considerations:

- **Building Materials and Sections.** Based on the Commission's feedback, the applicant has made some revisions including a thinning of the roof curve's profile along with some other material and color modifications. "Before and After" images are included within the applicant's presentation file.
- **Landscape Plan Modifications.** The previous plan included some landscape improvements and the extension of the mulched bed onto the adjacent property at 1102 E Washington Avenue. At this time, the adjoining property owner is not a party to this application and improvements have been revised to remain only on the subject property. Specific modifications include the retention/protection of existing trees on the adjoining property, the removal of some junipers previously proposed along that property line, and the addition of ornamental grasses along the Curtis Court frontage. Column climbing vines continue to be proposed along the supports for the roof overhang.

As a reference, staff refers the Commission to their comments from the September 22, 2021 Informational Presentation:

- I like unique architecture and this is definitely unique. The precedence from the instruments and curves, I like the way it transformed into the building. Struggle with the material, more durable by the thickness of the roof but the heartiest of the stone, don't know if this much is needed. Want to see the back more without the trees covering so much of that, what it looks like. Like the way it's coming together but look at the materials, lot of dark naturalness, might be too similar and close in color and texture.
- Big shout out to the curves, nice to see a different shape, the fact that the curves continue inside and not just on the roof. Curtis Court is such a tiny little street, with the loading dock coming off there, bless the people who live on Curtis Court. That's a tough sell for those residents.
- Exciting project. Agree with the materials comment, your inspirations of instruments and tension forms, this building is super heavy while the inspirations have a lightness and a fineness to them. The drive aisle feels claustrophobic. Not sure where the driftless comes in because we're not in a driftless area, the stone could use some finessing. Like the green area for Curtis Court, the project should be really respectful of the scale of that housing and how narrow that street is. Because there's this gap between the parking and this building I want to see some nice pedestrian access, even on the Curtis Court side.
- When you look at the WYSO logo it's light and airy like musical notes. The heaviness also takes away from the youth aspect. The new performing arts building is colorful and playful, youth buildings are always more colorful and playful and light. This is heavy and sophisticated. Don't be afraid to put some color in there.
- I love the expressive architecture, when you see this you immediately recognize it as something dedicated to the arts, that's really successful. Shout out to curves, that's really refreshing. My eye keeps going to the height of the limestone base, the way it follows a curve at the top and ends in a level datum that wraps around the building, I strikes me as odd. It's less pleasing than the rest of the form. To me the language on the left doesn't really fit with the rest of the building. Take that lower sweep and pull that horizontally more across that façade. Part of it is probably the rendering too. We'll want to see details on where the limestone meets the ground and what kind of limestone it is.
- Love it specifically because it is in contrast to almost everything new on E. Washington Avenue. Also agree with the lightness, keep the curves, lighten it up and make it more playful.

- The performance areas, the traffic noise may impact that and cause echoes, it's up to you to be sure the design responds to that in some ways vs. making this spandrel glass.

Finally, staff refers the Commission to their comments and conditions from the December 15, 2021, Initial Approval:

- I like this project, the uniqueness of the design. I'm struggling with the materiality, musicality is light and the building still appears heavy. The interior renderings look dark. I struggle with the columns being offset.
- I agree. Taper or knife edge the roofline coming around because it's weighty. Lighter base? Columns supporting the roofline don't tie to the lightness of an instrument. Could be that the stone on the eastside comes up pretty far, maybe taper that down a bit.
- Are there any concerns about the added traffic on Curtis Court?
- The ends of the curve chop off on the same plane, when all the images of curves taper. That might help with the organic feel and lightness of the curved wood elements. It feels dark facing the small houses on Curtis Court, something to think about. Those curvaceous elements could also go in and out on the sides so there are curves going all the way around the building.
- The color and thickness of the lower white one looks so much more elegant.
- Have you looked at screening the loading area or any type of vegetation?
- I really think that if the fascia was not all on one plane, broken to 2 or 3 different planes and stepped as it ended its cantilever, that could go a long way to make it feel lighter. Those blue columns tell me the thing is so heavy they can't even stand vertical, it almost looks like they're straining under the weight of this soffit. The rusticated base is a 19<sup>th</sup> Century motif for saying strong and impenetrable. Not fundamental in the design, maybe too much in materials and elements and a little bit more refinement.
- The stone has such a nice soft quality and a rough texture, to see it go up in a curve goes against how stone seems to work in nature. The rhythm on your mullions and window treatments is working so nicely, I wonder if the stone shouldn't step down instead of going with a curve like that.
- Are those columns structural or decorative?
- I think of that as a delicate thing but this has lost that delicate interpretation.
- Those curves are too thick. The columns, I like the way they represent strings and introduces color. I would point out that there are plantings all along the side and will be wrapped with climbing Honeysuckle. There will be leaves and vines on those columns and be fronted by columnar Arborvitae, that will take away a lot of the seeming mass of the stonework along the bottom.
- There's a lot to like in the landscape plan. We rarely see plantings where there's a nod to ephemeral spring plants (Virginia bluebells).
- I really like this building, it's strikingly different, unique and exciting to see. A few refinements could really take it to the next level.
- I really do like this building and it's so different than any other metal panel building we see going up. The curves might appear less thick if it ended at a 90 degree angle and not perpendicular to the ground. I do like the addition of the metal columns but when you get the base it's so tall and so much thicker. It might be successful if you just brought one down without that bulky base. Examine how this would be if you flipped the darker materials on the bottom to a reasonable base height with the lighter materials on top.
- I really like the wood, flat seam metal panel and stone. The copper never tarnishes and seems a bronze could be a little bit more true to the rest of your material palette.
- Now I struggle with the roof vs. wood. You have to revisit your material selection and placement. It's not a bad building, I love the curves and how it breaks up, I see the outdoor patio in a different material but I don't know that it needs to carry around to the front.

- I like this building very much. I would like to see some alternatives to the heaviness. The long curve on E. Washington may need the weight and strength of the heaviness. The E. Washington Avenue corridor plan called for a double alley of street trees in front of all properties. This landscape plan doesn't show anything other than the existing trees.